



Maidstone, St Michael's Church of England Junior School

Inspection Report

Better
education
and care

Unique Reference Number 118625
LEA Kent
Inspection number 280359
Inspection dates 19 June 2006 to 20 June 2006
Reporting inspector Martin James AI

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

Type of school	Junior	School address	Douglas Road
School category	Voluntary controlled		Maidstone
Age range of pupils	7 to 11		Kent ME16 8ER
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01622 751502
Number on roll	170	Fax number	01622 685004
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Fr Paul Gibbons
Date of previous inspection	20 November 2000	Headteacher	Mrs Kathy Spencer

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school is situated near the centre of Maidstone. The school is smaller than the average primary school. Attainment on entry varies from year to year, with the current Year 6 pupils having been just below average on entry. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average. The majority of pupils come from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is above average. The headteacher was appointed in an acting capacity in January 2006. She was appointed permanently three weeks before the inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires significant improvement, because it is performing significantly less well than in all circumstances it could reasonably be expected to perform. The school is therefore given a Notice to Improve. Significant improvement is required in relation to teaching and the pupils' achievement.

The school judges its effectiveness to be satisfactory. However, the inspection judges it to be inadequate because many pupils do not do well enough in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Improvement since the previous inspection, in relation to raising standards in English and mathematics, is unsatisfactory, and the school does not currently provide value for money.

Teaching and learning are inadequate because the assessment of pupils' work and the tracking of pupils' progress are ineffective. Teachers do not use information well enough to provide pupils, especially the higher attainers, with challenging work. As a result, these pupils underachieve. The work provided for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is more suited to their needs, and their achievement is satisfactory. Pupils' personal development is satisfactory. Most pupils behave well and contribute positively to the school and local community. Aspects of the pastoral care of pupils are good, and most pupils like school. The curriculum benefits from an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities.

Leadership and management are satisfactory, and those of the new headteacher are good. Since her appointment, she has worked hard with staff, governors and representatives of the local authority, to identify what needs to be done to help pupils reach their potential. There is now a shared determination at all levels to improve the school, especially in relation to improving pupils' achievement. However, everyone realises that there is much more to be done, and the school has clearly recognised appropriate priorities for improvement. Professional support has identified ways to improve teaching, and senior staff are currently developing their monitoring and evaluation roles. These all now need further strengthening in order to raise pupils' achievement. Inspection findings of 'green shoots' of improvement, and a willingness and dedication on behalf of staff, confirm that the school has the capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- improve teaching by making better use of assessment information to provide pupils with more challenging tasks
- improve procedures for tracking pupils' progress to identify more carefully where they are likely to underachieve
- increase the effectiveness of senior managers and subject leaders in monitoring and improving the quality of teaching and pupils' achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school varies. In 2005, the pupils in Year 6 attained broadly as expected on entry, whilst the current Year 6 were just below average. In 2005, standards at the end of Year 6 were below average in English, mathematics and science, and the inspection shows that this is also the position this year. There are weaknesses in particular in pupils' writing skills, in their ability to tackle problem-solving activities in mathematics and in their understanding and use of scientific terminology.

A significant number of these pupils underachieve, taking account of their starting points and capabilities. They are not reaching their targets. Assessment information is not used well enough to set challenging work for higher-attaining pupils and teachers do not have high enough expectations of them. For example, the majority of pupils who have the potential to reach Level 5 (the higher level) in the national tests for eleven-year-olds fail to do so.

Pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities make satisfactory progress towards meeting their targets. They are assessed well, are given work that suits their needs and they are given well-directed support by both teachers and teaching assistants.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development and well-being are satisfactory. Pupils behave well, they have positive attitudes to work and they generally stay on task, even when lessons are not very stimulating. Attendance is satisfactory, and most pupils enjoy coming to school.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils celebrate and learn about cultural diversity through activities such as a local multi-cultural festival and a visit to a mosque. Clubs, such as the school choir, successfully promote pupils' social development. The school has a strong Christian ethos, and good use is made of assemblies to support pupils' spiritual development. Pupils are careful to carry out all school activities safely, for example when taking part in physical education, and they are aware of the need to adopt a healthy diet, such as eating healthy foods and taking regular exercise. The school council ensures that pupils have a say in the school, and members like the fact that they get the opportunity to express their views. They are very pleased with their involvement in the redecoration of the toilets. Pupils have satisfactory opportunities to take on responsibilities, for example by helping each other to solve their problems and by Year 6 pupils acting as monitors. These activities help to equip pupils with skills they will need in later life. However, the standards being produced by pupils in English and mathematics do not yet contribute adequately towards their future economic well-being.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Teaching and learning are inadequate, with the result that many pupils underachieve. Teachers plan lessons satisfactorily and have good relationships with their pupils. This ensures that pupils behave well and have good attitudes to their learning. Teaching assistants work well alongside their colleagues. However, assessment is not used well enough to match work to many pupils' individual learning needs. As a result, these pupils, especially higher attainers, are not fully challenged in lessons, so that in those lessons, and also over time, they do not achieve as well as they should. Although marking is undertaken, there are too few helpful comments or suggestions for improvement to help pupils develop their learning further. Presentation of much work is untidy, and in some cases shows a deterioration over the year.

In the lessons seen during the inspection, there were some good aspects. For example, teachers' good subject knowledge in a music and a science lesson engaged the pupils' interest and enabled them to make good progress. Additionally, pupils were challenged by the teachers' good questioning. Sound support is given to pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, and the work provided for them is better suited to their needs. As a result, they make satisfactory progress towards their targets.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory. There is satisfactory provision for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, with clear education plans, and group work to support reading. This enables them to make sound, and sometimes good, progress. There is secure planning in place to cover all areas of the curriculum, and personal, social and health education supports personal development well. Pupils know about safe use of apparatus in science and physical education, and they are made aware of the need to follow a healthy lifestyle. However, provision for literacy and numeracy is not ensuring that pupils make enough progress in those subject areas.

There are excellent opportunities for enrichment, which pupils really enjoy and which they support in high numbers. They are delighted with the range of after-school clubs, which cover a wide variety of interests and include a good number of sports clubs. Year 6 pupils thoroughly enjoyed their visit to Swanage where they were involved in teamworking and orienteering. A trip to see HMS Belfast was also much enjoyed.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, support and guidance are satisfactory. The school provides a welcoming and supportive environment where pupils are confident to approach staff if they are worried. Pupils say that there is little bullying, and if it occurs it is dealt with well. They say

behaviour is much better than it was. Child protection procedures are fully in place; staff are trained and fully aware of their role. Outside agencies are used well to support regular attendance, and give support and advice to help the school fully meet the range of pupils' needs. There is good provision for vulnerable pupils, including transfer to secondary school. Through the provision of physical education, clear information on sun care and healthy foods, and after-school sports clubs, the school ensures that pupils have an active and healthy lifestyle.

Teachers mark pupils' work, but rarely add comments or advice. Pupils also have targets for improving their work. However, discussions with pupils show that they are not always clear enough about what they need to do to make their work better.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory. However, those of the new headteacher are good. On appointment, she perceptively identified weaknesses in the school, recognising, too, that not enough had been done to address the issues raised at the last inspection. Through improved school self-evaluation processes and sharply focused improvement planning, she has helped other staff to have a clear understanding of the school's priorities. In particular, she worked closely with subject leaders to produce a demonstrable improvement in their management of their subjects, especially in relation to the need to identify, and start eradicating, underachievement amongst pupils. Although it is too soon for this to have improved standards, it has had a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour. Improved performance management systems are also helping all staff to better understand their roles and responsibilities.

The school knows there is still more to do. In the past, senior staff and subject leaders have not had enough professional support and training to help them carry out their leadership and management responsibilities effectively. Through the new headteacher's strong leadership, they are improving their skills in monitoring and evaluation, to help analyse standards and to recognise gaps in learning. However, their expertise in the use of data to identify underachievement still requires further development, to ensure that all pupils are progressing at least satisfactorily.

The school has built strong links with the church and the neighbouring infant school. The school also regularly obtains the views of both parents and pupils, and these are taken into account when decisions are being taken, for example about school uniform.

Governance is now satisfactory. Governors recognise that they have not always been challenging enough of the school, especially in relation to standards and achievement. However, they are clearly aware that there has been a problem with underachievement, and they are fully supportive of the headteacher in her drive towards improvement. The demonstrable improvements in self-evaluation, school improvement planning and pupils' behaviour indicate that the school has sufficient capacity to improve further.

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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?	4	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3	NA
The quality and standards in foundation stage	NA	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3	NA
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	NA
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No	NA

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4	NA
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3	NA
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4	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?	3	NA
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3	NA
The behaviour of learners	2	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	3	NA
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	NA
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4	NA

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4	NA
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	NA
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3	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	4	NA
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4	NA
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	4	NA
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3	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

Thank you for making us so welcome when we came to visit your school this week. We enjoyed talking to you, and I know that my colleague enjoyed speaking with the School Council in particular. I am writing to tell you what we found out about your school, what we think is good and what we think needs to be made better.

Here are some of the highlights:

- most of you behave well, and help to make the school a happy place
- you are sensible about making decisions on how to improve your school
- you really enjoy the different clubs and outings that the school provides
- your headteacher, teachers and teaching assistants care about you and look after you
- you know all about how important it is to eat healthy food and to take exercise.

However, we think that many of you do not do as well as you could with your work, and so we have given the school something called a Notice to Improve. We have asked the school to:

- keep a careful check on your progress to make sure that you learn as well as you can, especially in English, mathematics and science
- give you work that makes you think hard, and that you do not find too easy
- look closely at how you are being taught to make sure you are doing as well as you can in lessons

We are sure that you will help your teachers by working hard and trying to do your very best.

Have a lovely summer holiday.

Best wishes,

Martin James Lead Inspector