



St Mark's CofE Primary School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 103836
Local Authority Dudley
Inspection number 286780
Inspection dates 16–17 October 2006
Reporting inspector Bogusia Matusiak-Varley

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	High Street
School category	Voluntary controlled		Pensnett
Age range of pupils	3–11		Brierley Hill DY5 4DZ
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01384 818935
Number on roll (school)	317	Fax number	01384 818936
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Jane Price
		Headteacher	Ian Walker
Date of previous school inspection	1 June 2001		

Age group	Inspection dates	Inspection number
3–11	16–17 October 2006	286780

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by three Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mark's C of E Primary School is situated in an area of significant disadvantage. The school has a high percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals and the proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average. When children start school their skills are very limited. The school is part of an Excellence Cluster which means it has a learning mentor and family link worker supporting both pupils and their families. The headteacher, who joined the school in September 2005, has appointed a considerable number of new staff and they have only been working together as a team since September 2006.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 4

There is a buzz of excitement as pupils enter the school early so that they can get on with the quizzes and tasks set by their class teachers. Immaculately dressed in their new green and yellow uniform, they proudly talk about the recent improvements to the playground and classrooms and unanimously agree that the school is a great place to be. Parents endorse their children's views. 'It's hard to believe that so many changes have happened so quickly, the school is a wonderful environment for our children and everybody here cares about them'.

However, in spite of many recent changes, there is still a lot to do. At present, the school is not as effective as it should be and has not shown it has the capacity to improve where it matters most. The school meets pupils' pastoral needs, but does not ensure that they are learning as well as they should. Pupils are not attaining the standards of which they are capable and their achievements are inadequate. Standards are very low in English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology (ICT). The school has too rosy a view of itself because checks on its strengths and weaknesses are not sharp enough.

Provision in the Foundation Stage is good and children get off to a flying start, but this is not sustained in later years. This is because of weaknesses in teaching, particularly in using assessment information to ensure that all groups of pupils are given tasks that build on what they already know and can do. Not all pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities have individual plans with clear targets to help their progress and this prevents them from learning at a fast rate. Teaching and learning are inadequate. Whilst all teachers can deliver elements of satisfactory and good teaching, pupils' progress is unsatisfactory because tasks set do not meet their needs, especially for those with learning difficulties and disabilities and those capable of higher attainment. This weakness is further compounded by an inadequate curriculum which does not build on pupils' prior learning or meet the needs of pupils in mixed-age classes. Too few opportunities are provided for pupils to develop and use their skills in literacy, numeracy and ICT. Skills and knowledge relating to science and other subjects are not being consistently taught throughout the school.

So why has this happened? This is a direct result of inadequate leadership and management. The headteacher has improved many aspects of school life, but senior staff lack clear direction and guidance to ensure that they know exactly what to do in order to raise standards quickly and effectively. There is a lack of rigorous systems to ensure that provision meets pupils' needs so that they make progress at a sustained and consistent rate in all year groups.

In accordance with section 13 (3) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards and improve achievement in English, mathematics, science and ICT by ensuring that the curriculum is better matched to the pupils' stages of development.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning so that teachers have high expectations of all pupils, particularly higher attainers, and ensure that assessment information is used rigorously to move pupils on in their learning.
- Ensure that pupils who have learning difficulties and disabilities have clear targets identified in their individual education plans so that their needs are consistently met in lessons.
- Implement rigorous systems to ensure that staff are held accountable for the standards that pupils attain and are very clear as to what they need to do in order to raise those standards and improve achievement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 4

Children make rapid progress in the Foundation Stage as a result of good teaching and good provision. From a low starting point, they reach the levels expected at the start of Year 1. The good start that they have made is not built on well enough in Years 1 to 6 and, as a result, pupils underachieve.

The 2006 test results and the school's own data show an improving picture in Year 6, but standards are still too low for these pupils. Pupils make sound progress when they are coached for tests. However, work in pupils' exercise books demonstrates that they struggle with applying skills learnt in lessons and have weak spelling and weak sentence construction. Pupils also lack adequate recording skills and struggle with problem solving in numeracy. In Year 2, standards have declined over the past three years. Underachievement is most marked throughout the school in all aspects of English, in problem solving and data handling in mathematics, and in the experimental and investigative aspects of science. Standards in speaking and listening are very low and pupils have difficulty in explaining their thinking. Underachievement is particularly marked for the most capable pupils. Those with learning difficulties and disabilities do not do well enough because targets for their improvement are not clear enough and not used to guide work set in lessons. The school has had very low standards for far too long and pupils are not being adequately prepared for the next stage of education or for later life.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is satisfactory. Pupils know right from wrong because the learning mentor ensures that pupils are able to air their views on any misdemeanours. Acts of Collective Worship enable pupils to understand the various cultural influences on our society.

The headteacher has implemented some good strategies to enable pupils to have their say through the creation of house teams and electing a head boy and head girl. Relationships throughout the school are satisfactory.

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory, but they struggle in independent activities because some of them have difficulty in staying focused. Pupils also lose concentration when the work is undemanding. Most pupils understand the need for safe practices, move sensibly around the school and know the importance of healthy eating and regular exercise. Pupils have contributed well to the community by raising money for the MacMillan nurses and they take part in many competitions, such as devising anti-bullying posters, which win awards. They have sound opportunities to work in teams and collaborate well with their 'talking partners' in all lessons. Playground buddies fulfil their duties well, making sure that no one is excluded from playtime activities. Although punctuality is satisfactory, attendance rates are far too low.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 4

Teachers have successfully established a safe learning environment for pupils, with orderly classroom routines and stimulating displays. Teachers are professional, caring and have some sound teaching skills, such as offering good explanations. However, what prevents teaching from being effective is the lack of use of assessment data to make sure that different groups of pupils move on in their learning. As a result, teachers' expectations are not high enough and there is little variation in the tasks set for pupils of differing capabilities. This particularly affects the progress of pupils who are higher attainers and those with learning difficulties and disabilities. Support assistants are not effectively deployed to meet the needs of all pupils, resulting in unsatisfactory learning. Teaching in the Foundation Stage is consistently good, with a strong emphasis placed upon teaching basic skills, resulting in all groups of children making good progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 4

Weaknesses in the curriculum are key factors in the underachievement of pupils. Activities are not planned well enough to develop pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills consistently as they move up through the school. Too little attention is given to the use and development of basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Planning in all areas is weak because not enough attention is paid to ensuring that pupils make progress at a consistent rate as they go through the school. Provision in science is weak because there are too few opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in experimenting and investigating. Satisfactory provision is made for extra-curricular activities but the school does not use the locality sufficiently well to support learning.

The curriculum in the Foundation Stage is good. It is well planned and covers all areas of learning. It contributes well to children's good achievement.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Whilst the school provides adequate pastoral care and parents are very pleased that their children are happy, pupils do not receive enough guidance about their school work. Pupils are not sure about their targets or what they need to do to improve and marking is not sufficiently informative, although very thorough marking was seen in one Year 6 class. The learning mentor plays a key role in encouraging individual pupils to develop strategies for sorting out problems. Child protection and risk assessment procedures are secure. The school has taken robust action to improve attendance levels and is working well with outside agencies, parents and the learning mentor to ensure that pupils come to school regularly. However, the impact of this is not yet reflected in raised attendance levels.

Leadership and management

Grade: 4

Ineffective leadership has resulted in the school failing to meet many of the pupils' needs. Weaknesses identified in the previous report have still not been addressed and the pace of improvement in raising standards is too slow. The leadership and management have been successful in establishing a strong presence for the school in the community through developing links with partner institutions. However, not enough has been done to tackle weaknesses in teaching. Newly appointed staff do not have clear guidance on the role that they should play in improving pupils' achievement because there is no whole-school strategy for this. The school is not moving forward because of the lack of strategic systems to secure improvement, such as rigorous monitoring of planning and checking on the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at raising standards. Leadership of key subjects such as English and mathematics is weak because of the lack of direction to secure improvement. Governors are now fulfilling their roles of being critical friends of the school and are fully aware that the school is not as effective as it could be in addressing underachievement. They have sound knowledge of weaknesses in pupils' standards because they are receiving regular information from the headteacher. They have offered effective advice to the headteacher in managing change, especially in the way the new curriculum planning is proposed to be delivered.

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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?	4
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	3
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	4
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	4
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	No

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	4
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	4
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	4

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The attendance of learners	4
How well learners enjoy their education	3
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	4

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	4
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	4
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

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?	4
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	4
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	4
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	4
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	4
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?	Yes
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited the school recently. We agree with you that your school building is very clean and safe and we share your delight at the well-maintained playground. We are pleased that you take part in so many competitions to stop bullying and the generous way in which you contribute to charities.

We think that your headteacher and staff care appropriately for your personal needs but, in spite of your positive attitudes, behaviour and loyalty to your school, you are not learning enough. We have asked your headteacher and staff to put several things in place to enable you to learn more effectively. You can help by coming to school more regularly and by making sure that you know what to do to improve your work.

We have asked the school to use information from your assessments to plan activities in lessons that are more suited to your needs so that you can reach higher standards in English, mathematics, science and ICT. We have also asked the headteacher and staff to improve learning opportunities for you so that you have a good idea of what you need to learn in each subject. Those of you who find learning easy need to be challenged to do harder work, and for those who find learning difficult, special care needs to be given to making sure that the activities you do help you to meet your targets.

We think that you look very smart in your new school uniform and we wish you all the very best in the future.