

St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Thornbury

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	109263
Local Authority	South Gloucestershire
Inspection number	288330
Inspection dates	11–12 July 2007
Reporting inspector	Mo Roberts HMI

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	195
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Debbie Ash
Headteacher	Avril Muirhead
Date of previous school inspection	4 March 2002
School address	Church Road Thornbury Bristol BS35 1HJ
Telephone number	01454 866760
Fax number	01454 866762

Age group	4-11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average-sized primary school serving an affluent area. Pupils are from a White British background, with just a few from other ethnic groups. The number eligible for free school meals is below the national average, as is the number with learning difficulties and/or disabilities. Very few pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The school is a church school with a strong Christian ethos. The school roll is falling. Pupils enter school with skills that are above the levels typically expected for their age group. The headteacher is called the headlearner in this school.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Mary's is a good school with some outstanding aspects. Children get off to a good start in the Foundation Stage, and many are already well advanced into the National Curriculum before they enter Year 1. Pupils make excellent progress further up the school and by the age of 11, standards are exceptionally high. Achievement across the whole breadth of the excellent curriculum is outstanding.

Teaching is good and is carefully adapted to suit learners of all abilities so pupils do very well against their personal targets as well as national standards. Teachers are not complacent with the consistently high standards; they continually look for new ways to engage and motivate pupils, including using modern technology to good effect. The curriculum includes special 'themed' weeks, such as those devoted to enrichment and problem solving and learning French. Pupils especially enjoy these times. They have begun to be involved in assessing their own learning and working with their peers to identify what needs to be done next. However, teachers' marking and the way in which they use targets are not yet always consistent in identifying the next steps in learning.

The school has a strong Christian tradition and pupils respond very well to the many opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Good care, support and guidance promote pupils' self-esteem. Consequently, pupils' personal development is good and they leave school confident in their abilities and ready for the next stage of their learning. They are keen to help each other. For example, older pupils take a role in helping new ones settle when they arrive in the Reception class. Pupils behave very well and know how to keep healthy and stay safe. The curriculum provides pupils with the opportunity to engage with the local community in creative ways, but pupils do not always feel that their views are fully taken into account within school.

Most parents are pleased with the school and all that it offers. Some commended the many opportunities to visit the school and to see the wide range of things pupils achieve. However, some parents expressed concerns. These largely stem from a perceived lack of effective communication between home and school. Although there are regular and informative newsletters and a school website, some parents responding to the questionnaire and to inspectors' questions felt communication between home and school was not entirely effective. Self-evaluation is very detailed and broadly accurate but the school did not recognise, prior to the inspection, that it had not fully taken into account the views of all its stakeholders. As a result, it is not yet putting across to all involved its outstanding features. The headteacher, senior leadership team and governors ensure consistently high academic standards. Leadership and management are good overall and the school has the capacity to be outstanding if it can improve its consultation methods and then rectify any difficulties with communication that are identified.

What the school should do to improve further

- Strengthen the school by identifying the barriers reported by some parents to effective communication and rectify the situation.
- Ensure the school fully promotes itself in the community and involves all stakeholders effectively.
- Check that all teachers consistently use targets and marking to clearly show pupils what to do next to improve their work.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Standards are exceptionally high in all subjects and have been maintained at this excellent level for a number of years. All pupils make consistently good progress in all years and build really well on their attainment on entry to school, which is above that typically found. Overall achievement is outstanding and reflects the exceptional curriculum that is provided throughout the school. Children in the Reception class achieve well and start Year 1 well above expected levels. This is because they are given tasks that interest and engage them in learning. Pupils with learning difficulties progress very well because they are given appropriate support that is carefully tailored to meet their needs. The good link with the local secondary school ensures that pupils with particular gifts and talents maintain their exceptionally high standards through exciting events that fully challenge and motivate them.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development and well-being are good. Their attitudes to learning are excellent and underpin the high standards they achieve. Attendance is not as good as it could be; the school recently missed the target set for attendance by the local authority. Pupils behave responsibly and safely in lessons and around school. A small minority of parents have concerns about behaviour and bullying, but pupils are confident that any bullying will be dealt with, and both staff and pupils emphasised that it occurred fairly infrequently. Pupils work well together, particularly within their 'family groups' when older pupils enjoy teaching younger ones. Pupils have confidence to take an active part in class discussions and often persevere with difficult tasks. Their economic understanding is well developed, for instance, through opportunities to plan projects like a local theme park. However, not all pupils are fully aware of the school's links with local businesses. The benefits of physical exercise are well understood, although pupils feel that not everyone who could get exercise by walking to school does so. Pupils like the healthy school food. The importance of healthy eating is understood by pupils. Most take on duties such as helping to organise assemblies, and the opportunities for older pupils to help Reception pupils with their social skills at lunchtimes are an outstanding feature. The school council successfully offers pupils the chance to be involved in school decision-making. However, they do not always feel they have sufficient opportunities to discuss issues they would like to put forward.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teachers use questioning adeptly to extend pupils' thinking skills. Pupils' vocabulary improves because adults clearly model and explain useful concepts and terms, such as what is involved in a 'systematic investigation' or in writing Japanese poetry. Teachers have high expectations for work and behaviour in the classroom. Pupils develop confidence by doing paired work and reviewing achievements with a partner. Teaching assistants are an effective part of the teaching team. They are well deployed to give good support to groups and individual pupils. In the Foundation Stage, pupils have opportunities to learn outdoors and to select their own activities some of the time, so they become increasingly independent. Systems for gathering information

about pupils' performance and tracking their progress are highly effective. They help leaders and teachers to identify where pupils need more help in order to achieve their full potential. Teachers make good use of assessment to plan well for all ability levels, including those with learning difficulties and those who require extended challenges. However, they do not always fully involve pupils in understanding how their targets help them to progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The school provides an exceptional curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils. An extensive range of visitors and visits makes learning exciting, fun and interesting and enables pupils to achieve as well as they do. The range of out-of-school activities is good and enriches the pupils' experience. Younger pupils especially like the maths games club. Year 6 pupils appreciate the early morning mental maths club run prior to their national tests. Pupils have vivid memories of what they learned at the Bristol life skills centre regarding what to do in an emergency. All pupils, including those with learning difficulties, have many opportunities to take part in the different activities that are offered, including those related to sports. The girls' football group has raised their confidence in their skills. Art and music are exceptionally strong and ensure pupils have a well-rounded experience of learning in different ways and through all their senses. Pupils are justifiably proud of their school productions, which reach a high standard.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The good induction of the Reception children ensures that they settle in well and quickly become part of the community. The pupils in Years 1 to 6 are well cared for and this contributes to their enjoyment of school. The procedures to ensure that pupils are kept safe and secure, including those relating to child protection, are satisfactory and clearly understood by staff. Personal development is monitored well and pupils are confident that adults will help them if they need assistance. Good personal support and guidance is provided for pupils who have learning difficulties, with the school working closely with outside agencies. Academic support is sound overall. Literacy and numeracy targets are clearly displayed in classrooms and in books but marking lacks consistency and enough detail to easily help pupils know how to improve.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school leaders are committed to promoting the continual development of the school. The quality of teaching and learning is monitored rigorously. This leads to prompt improvements when problems are identified. The curriculum is evaluated systematically and now includes, for example, more physical education. Pupils' information and communication technology skills are similarly being further developed. The school reaches almost all of its challenging targets. There is good evidence of on-going developments such as the travel plan. This demonstrates how the leadership team draw on the expertise of individual staff members, in this case, those of a geographer. Professional development is supported where a need is identified and senior managers are encouraged to pursue additional qualifications. Governors have a committee structure that allows them to monitor the work of the school satisfactorily and most have begun to visit and explore the school's work at first hand. The chair of governors provides good support to the school and has worked hard to assist in resolving some complex staffing issues. The

school's improvement plan sets clear priorities for continued future development. It is, however, some time since the school sought all parents' views in a full survey and where necessary took them into account in its development planning.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	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?	2
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	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

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

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
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

13 July 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Thornbury BS35 1HJ

Thank you for welcoming us into your lovely school and being so friendly. We really enjoyed the two days we spent with you. We were very pleased to see how much you enjoy coming to school and how very polite and well behaved you are.

What we liked most about your school

- We think you go to a good school that has some outstanding features like the interesting theme weeks and many other activities that stimulate you to achieve so much.
- Because you all work very hard and do your best you make excellent progress, you think hard and are good at sticking to the tasks in class – even when they are challenging.
- By the time you leave, in Year 6, standards in English, mathematics and science are some of the highest in the country and this has been the pattern for a number of years.
- Your teachers work very hard to make sure your lessons help all the pupils in the class, and they ask you lots of good questions that give you a chance to explain your thinking and develop your knowledge and skills.

What we have asked your school to do next

- Improve the way everybody works together, especially by finding out why some parents feel that communicating with the school is not as easy as it should be, and see how to improve this further.
- Make sure everyone in the community knows about your school and all the good things you do.
- Make sure that teachers always make it clear to you what to do next to achieve your targets.

You and your families can help by making sure you celebrate the school's many successes and that you do not take more days off than are strictly necessary.

With best wishes for your future,

Mo Roberts Her Majesty's Inspector