

St Mary's CofE Junior School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	110842
Local Authority	CAMBRIDGESHIRE
Inspection number	288793
Inspection date	6 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Lynne Blakelock

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

Type of school	Junior
School category	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	353
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Canon Fred Kilner
Headteacher	Mr James Hickish
Date of previous school inspection	23 September 2002
School address	High Barns Ely Cambridgeshire CB7 4RB
Telephone number	01353 662163
Fax number	01353 666177

Age group	7–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector in one day.

Description of the school

This is a larger than average school serving the city of Ely. Pupils start here with levels of attainment which vary from year to year and are often below average. Fewer pupils than average are entitled to free school meals. A lower than average number of pupils has a statement of educational needs although this is rising. A higher than average number has learning difficulties and disabilities. The percentage of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds and the number for whom English is an additional language are lower than that found nationally.

The school has achieved National Healthy School status and Artsmark Silver and has gained the Safer Routes to School award. A building programme which includes a theatre and library is greatly improving the provision for learning.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The inspection confirms the school's own evaluation that this is a good school which has made good improvement since the last inspection and provides good value for money. It is also an ambitious school of which parents are very supportive. Central to the school's performance is the good leadership and management of the headteacher, supported effectively by his senior team. Their accurate evaluation of the school's effectiveness has resulted in a clear focus for school improvement. Careful restructuring of staff responsibilities has led to more efficient monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school. Governors' good knowledge of the performance of the school and their robust questioning adds to the effectiveness of leadership and management and ensures the school's good capacity to improve.

Pupils' good personal development is strengthened by the Christian ethos of the school so that pupils learn in an environment which promotes respect and care for all. Ownership and responsibility is truly embedded in the daily life of the school and results in confident and well-rounded pupils who are increasingly prepared for adult life and importantly can empathise with the needs and situations of others. They understand the need to live healthily and safely. Their happiness in school is strengthened by their feelings of security because the school has good systems in place to protect and support them. Close links with specialist agencies guide and support particularly well those pupils who are vulnerable. The care, guidance and support of pupils are satisfactory because although pastoral care is good, academic guidance is not yet developed fully and targets are not specific enough to maximise progress.

Pupils are making good progress through the school from their starting points. The standards that they attain by the end of Year 6 are in line with the national average overall and above average in English. Standards in mathematics continue to be lower than other subjects. A greater proportion of pupils attain higher levels in English than seen nationally because of the school's determination to raise literacy levels. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities make good progress because the support that they are given is clearly focused on their specific needs. Good teaching is central to the good progress that pupils are making. A greater variety of teaching methods, coupled with teachers' good knowledge of subjects, mean that pupils are keen to learn although the tasks that pupils are given do not regularly match closely enough to their particular learning needs. The delightful learning environment adds to pupils' enjoyment of school.

The good curriculum is an important factor in the progress that pupils make because they are increasingly motivated by the different ways in which learning is organised. Growing opportunities to learn across subjects are facilitating a greater breadth and depth to learning. The good development of information and communication technology (ICT) since the last inspection is used well by teachers in helping pupils to learn and in allowing pupils to learn for themselves. The much improved accommodation and partnerships with a nearby comprehensive school strengthen the curriculum. A relevant and interesting programme of enrichment activities benefits the personal development of pupils because it promotes greater independence, confidence and team skills.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise standards in mathematics to at least the standards that pupils attain in English.
- Ensure that the work and targets of pupils match closely their individual learning needs to enable them to make as much progress as possible.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Pupils achieve well from their starting points. The standards that they reach by the end of Year 6 are in line with the national average in science and overall. In mathematics, results vary from year to year. In 2006, pupils' performance in mathematics was below the national average and progress was satisfactory. In contrast, English results, including writing, rose further above the national average in 2006 and an above average percentage of pupils achieved higher levels. This was due to the school's emphasis on raising literacy standards. Information collected by the school and observations of teaching and learning during the inspection demonstrate that all pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, are making good progress throughout the school. This has extended to mathematics, where progress as in English and science, is now good and is helped by ability setting. School data points to standards in English continuing to be above the national average in 2007 and to being average in mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good. They enjoy school and learning, as evidenced by their good attendance, and respond positively to the school's high expectations. Their good behaviour and thoughtfulness towards others reflects the Christian ethos of the school, as depicted in their stained glass window, made by them, and which spells out 'respect' as the vision of the school and the principle by which they should all live. A significant reason for their happiness here is their growing involvement and ownership of their school and community, as seen in responsibilities such as 'play pals' and as organisers of the garden project, 'Grounds for Growing'. They are eager to apply for positions of responsibility which build up their confidence, help them to develop important skills and qualities for the world of work and demonstrate their good moral and social development. Pupils have a good understanding of healthy and safe lifestyles through a relevant programme of personal, social and health education. Although their spiritual development is good, their cultural understanding is developing and is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good. As a result, pupils make good progress in their learning. Teachers know their subjects well and are increasingly using a variety of learning styles to interest and motivate pupils. The use of interactive white boards in lessons is popular with pupils because they say that it makes learning easier and more fun. The learning environment is strengthened by colourful displays of pupils' work across many areas of the curriculum. Most pupils enjoy learning and try hard, particularly when they are able to learn for themselves. In the best lessons, sharp questioning encourages pupils to move forward in their learning. Activities set, however, do not regularly match closely enough the individual needs of pupils so that progress is not as rapid as it could be. Homework extends classroom learning because it offers interesting and sometimes fun tasks which reinforce literacy and numeracy skills.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is good. A particular strength is the outstanding range of residential visits which, along with a wide range of popular after school clubs, offers pupils many chances to discover new talents and develop their skills. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are well provided for. Provision for those with particular gifts and talents is developing. Increasing opportunities for learning across subjects are motivating pupils and increasing their enjoyment of learning. A building programme has significantly improved the provision for ICT and drama since the last inspection and pupils' creative talents are being stimulated by the new theatre. The new library provides fantastic reading materials to encourage a love of reading. Many pupils learn to play a musical instrument, another example of the good enrichment programme. A partnership with a local comprehensive school means that pupils are benefiting from specialist teaching in science, design and technology, mathematics and ICT. Provision for modern foreign languages is at an early stage of development.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

The quality of care, guidance and support, overall, is satisfactory. Day-to-day pastoral care, however, is good. Parents agree, expressing confidence that there is always a staff member to help any child with problems. The school meets all legal requirements to ensure pupils' safety and protection. Close links with outside agencies mean that those with particular issues or difficulties are well supported. Transition arrangements are well thought out so that pupils new to the school can settle quickly to learning. Academic support and guidance are satisfactory. All pupils know their targets in English and mathematics but these are general targets across a year group and do not meet the specific learning needs of pupils. Whilst there is good use of peer and self-assessment in a number of lessons, this is not fully developed. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are supported well by teaching assistants and by helpful programmes, resulting in strong encouragement for them to make good progress.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides strong leadership and is supported effectively by his senior staff so that there is a clear vision and direction to the work of the school. This is already evident in the building programme which is improving the quality of provision for pupils and in the development of the curriculum to further promote learning. Careful and regular monitoring and accurate evaluation of the school's work has resulted in the allocation of well-defined responsibilities to senior managers. These are promoting pupils' progress, although subject leaders would benefit from having a common focus in their drive to raise standards. The good team work of staff is strengthening the performance of the school, aided by strong governance. Governors have a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and are well placed to challenge its performance. Consequently, there is a good capacity to improve. There has been good improvement since the last inspection because the school has successfully tackled the issues raised.

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Annex A

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?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
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?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	2
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	1
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?	2
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.

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	2
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	2
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

7 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's Church of England Junior School, Ely, CB7 4RB

I am writing to thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school recently. I enjoyed my day with you very much. It was interesting to see you at work and play and to be able to hear from you about St Mary's. This letter will tell you what I found out about your school.

Your school is a good school and is well led by your headteacher. You enjoy being here and are making good progress. The standards that you are reaching are improving. Results in mathematics, though, are not as good as they are in English and science. You are pleased with the new buildings which make school a great place for you to learn in. You like ICT because you can learn for yourselves. So many of you told me how great the theatre is! The many lunchtime and after school activities on offer give you lots of chances to learn new skills. The best things, you said, are the visits, with pupils out in York and Leicester on the day of the inspection and Year 6 pupils looking forward to travelling to France.

I was impressed by your good behaviour and by how you support and help each other. It was pleasing to see so many of you taking on responsibilities, both in school and to benefit the local community. These are helping you to learn important skills that you will need when you are older. You are using your school council to make changes that will make your school an even better place to be.

There are ways that your school can improve. First, standards in mathematics are not as good as in other subjects so I am asking your teachers to continue strengthening teaching in this subject. I also found that some of the activities you are given in lessons are not closely enough matched to your individual abilities to enable you to make as much progress as you can. Similarly, it would help if the targets that you are given are targets just for you so that they fit your own learning needs.

I send you all my good wishes for the future.

Lynne Blakelock

Lead Inspector