



St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Inspection Report

Better
education
and care

Unique Reference Number 111316
Local Authority Halton
Inspection number 288925
Inspection date 18 January 2007
Reporting inspector Paul Bamber

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

Type of school	Primary	School address	Castlefields Avenue South
School category	Voluntary aided		Runcorn
Age range of pupils	3-11		Cheshire WA7 2NR
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01928 565995
Number on roll (school)	269	Fax number	01928 569298
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr John Furnival
		Headteacher	Mrs J Morris
Date of previous school inspection	26 February 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

Pupils in this average sized school are from predominantly White British heritage and many are from disadvantaged backgrounds. An average proportion have learning difficulties and/or disabilities and there is a small number of looked-after children. There is a stable school population of pupils and staff. The school has received many awards: it has Artsmark Gold, Investor in People status, a Healthy School Award, an award for its expertise in information and communication technology and the Active Sportsmark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school that offers excellent value for money. All aspects of its high quality provision and leadership contribute significantly to the outstanding achievement of all pupils. Lively, stimulating teaching promotes high standards throughout the school. As soon as children enter Nursery they experience a wide range of interesting activities, are successfully encouraged to become independent and have their basic skills well developed.

Despite many children entering the school with well below expected skills they thrive through the Nursery and Reception classes. As a result of skilful, well focused teaching, support and assessment, most achieve the goals set for them by the time they enter Year 1. Pupils continue to progress very well throughout the rest of the school and by the time they leave Year 6, standards are well above average. The only exception is that the more able pupils in Years 1 and 2 do not consistently achieve well in writing. The school acknowledges this, but despite introducing strategies to help improve achievement, it still remains a relative weakness.

The outstanding curriculum and the high quality care, support and guidance pupils receive ensure that the vast majority of pupils enjoy school, develop excellent personal and social skills and clearly appreciate how cultural diversity enhances their lives. They are very effective young citizens, contributing well to their local community and reaching out into the wider and international world to broaden their experiences and to show their support for those less fortunate than themselves. Although members of the school council contribute well to improving aspects of provision for pupils, the council is not fully representative and its constitution fails to give the opportunity to more than a small number of pupils to experience membership.

The school's management has established rigorous systems to check on how well pupils progress in their work. As a result, any who might fall behind are given extra support to catch up. In the same way, those pupils who are identified as having a special gift or talent are nurtured and enabled to flourish. The arrangements to support pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are also excellent. Parents report how well their children thrive and progress as a result. Pupils feel safe and secure because they know they can turn to a friendly and understanding adult if they are injured or upset. They feel at peace with their fellow pupils both in and out of the classroom.

This excellent school is extremely ably led by a talented and highly effective headteacher. The high standards expected of pupils and staff are met because all work with a common aim and purpose within a positive and purposeful atmosphere. The headteacher's influence in promoting the arts within the school and the way in which partnerships have been forged with a network of schools and with outside agencies mean that pupils' achievements in a wide range of creative arts are outstanding. The school has a very accurate knowledge of the quality of its work, has made outstanding improvement since the last inspection, and because it constantly seeks to improve has an excellent capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the achievement in writing of the more able pupils in Year 1 and Year 2.
- Review the constitution of the school council in order that it becomes more representative of a wider range of pupils.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

Throughout the school the vast majority of pupils make outstanding progress. With many children entering Nursery with well below expected skills, especially in their ability to communicate, they do really well to reach at least expected skills in all areas of their learning by the time they enter Year 1. They exceed expected levels in their personal and emotional development and in their physical development. Most continue to achieve very well in Years 1 and 2 and reach above average standards on entry to Year 3. The exception is the more able pupils, who achieve satisfactorily in writing. The school sets ambitious targets for performance in the Year 6 English and mathematics national tests and regularly exceeds them, with standards being well above average and even higher in science. Whatever their ability, all pupils progress extremely well in Years 3 to 6, because of the very well focused teaching.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary and they have very positive attitudes to learning. This contributes significantly to their outstanding achievement, their well above average standards and their considerable enjoyment in learning. Pupils from an early age work cooperatively and independently. They are helpful and quickly realise that along with any rights they enjoy, they have responsibilities. Older pupils contribute well to school routines and to the well-being and personal and social development of younger or more vulnerable children, by acting as mentors and play leaders. They are compassionate about the needs of others, giving up their time to raise funds. Pupils are concerned about the environment and the way in which international trade sometimes seems to disadvantage groups of people, and they have a growing understanding of the business world. Their above average attendance, good punctuality and excellent acquisition of basic skills prepare them well for the next stages of their education. Too few pupils have the opportunity to contribute to the school council's membership or to make decisions affecting the school's provision.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

A key factor in the outstanding progress pupils make and the high standards they attain is the excellent quality of teaching and learning. Because teachers demand high standards of work and commitment from their pupils and nearly always establish positive relationships with them, lessons are purposeful and productive. Staff make clear what they expect pupils to learn, set tasks that meet the needs of them all, provide very lucid explanations and instructions and use resources creatively. As a result, pupils enjoy learning and consistently meet the targets set for them. Pupils' learning is enhanced because they know from teachers' marking and from the targets they are set exactly where they are and what they need to do to improve further. They are aware of the National Curriculum levels at which they work and how to move on to the higher levels. The quality of teaching and support for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are excellent, enabling them to attain well and to make outstanding progress.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The outstanding curriculum fully meets national requirements. It plays a significant role in pupils' obvious enjoyment of learning, in ensuring high achievement and standards and in promoting their excellent personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The taught curriculum provides pupils with rich experiences and these are augmented by many exciting visits, expert visitors and a wide range of after-school clubs available to pupils of all ages. The impressive personal, social and health education programme effectively teaches pupils the benefits of following a healthy lifestyle through both eating sensibly and taking regular exercise. The provision for art is outstanding and has been recognised through the award of the Artsmark Gold. The school is also very active on the sporting front, competing successfully against other schools. The use of specialist teachers also enhances pupils' achievements in many subjects as well as preparing them well for moving from class to class.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils say they are safe and secure. All safeguarding procedures to ensure their good health and safety and for assessing any risks to them or to adults are in place. Parents understandably report very positively about how well their children are looked after. There are very rigorous and extremely effective systems to check on pupils' progress and to implement support for any who might need to catch up with their work. Because teachers know the pupils and their families so well and are so concerned about their welfare, the procedures to track pupils' personal development, attendance and punctuality are excellent and impact very positively on their ability to learn.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The excellent quality of leadership and management is central to this outstanding school. The extremely able leadership of the headteacher has enabled other staff to develop their skills successfully to take on key management roles. This extends from the excellent quality of leadership in the Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2 to the outstanding way in which subjects are led and managed. The school is very rigorous in the way in which it checks on the progress pupils make, the quality of teaching and learning and whether changes it makes to provision result in improved standards and achievement for pupils. The highly effective partnerships the school has made with other institutions and the care with which staff development is planned and executed have borne much fruit in better teaching and a vibrant curriculum. There is a confidence and positiveness about the whole school which has been engendered by demanding but sensitive leadership. Governors contribute well to the school's smooth financial running and individual governors provide specific expertise to the benefit of staff and pupils.

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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?	1
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1
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	2
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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The attendance of learners	2
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	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	1
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?	1

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?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
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	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
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

Thank you for making me so welcome during the days I spent in your school. I very much enjoyed my visit to your school and it is currently providing you with an outstanding education.

What is outstanding about your school:

- you behave extremely well, obviously enjoy school very much and get on very well together
- there are many very interesting things for you to do in your lessons and in the after-school clubs
- your artwork is most impressive
- most of your lessons are excellent and your teachers help you to do very well with your work and to make really good progress
- you are very well looked after in school and feel safe
- the school is run extremely well and your headteacher knows exactly what to do to make it even better.

For the school to help you to do even better the next steps are:

- to make sure that those of you in Years 1 and 2 who find your work a bit easier than others do better in writing
- to look at how the school council is run to see if more of you can take a turn in being a member and to be involved in electing pupils to be councillors.

Thank you for helping me with the inspection of your school. I hope that you continue to really enjoy school and carry on doing really well.