

St Mark's CofE Primary School, Morwenstow

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111992
Local Authority	Cornwall
Inspection number	289136
Inspection dates	21–22 June 2007
Reporting inspector	David Humphries HMI

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Voluntary controlled
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	79
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Maria Baston
Headteacher	Janette Creber
Date of previous school inspection	5 November 2001
School address	Shop Morwenstow Bude EX23 9PE
Telephone number	01288 331395
Fax number	01288 331395

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors.

Description of the school

St Mark's is a small primary school serving an isolated rural area of north Cornwall. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is low, although the school's catchment area is not prosperous. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or with a first language other than English. Pupil mobility is higher than average.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St Mark's is a good school with many outstanding features. One parent wrote: 'St Mark's is a fantastic school, exciting and interesting, and both my children enjoy it.' This captures some of the key strengths of the school. An outstanding curriculum is greatly enhanced by an imaginative programme of enrichment activities, often drawing on the school's excellent links with the local community. Staff and children treat each other with care and respect and work together very productively. Pupils flourish in this highly supportive and positive atmosphere. They greatly enjoy their education, work hard and want to succeed. They act safely and responsibly and their behaviour is outstanding. Their views are valued by staff and governors and often influence the decisions they make, for example changes to arrangements for collective worship in assemblies.

Teaching is consistently good. Mixed-age classes are carefully organised and skilfully managed by highly committed teachers and teaching assistants. Outstanding partnerships with outside organisations provide pupils with rich and diverse learning experiences extending well beyond their small rural community. The standards that pupils reach are consistently above average; in Year 6, national test results have shown a marked improvement and standards are now well above average. This is because good teaching, combined with positive attitudes towards learning, ensures that pupils make good progress throughout the school. Teachers know their pupils very well, but there is not yet a systematic approach to using assessment to identify individual weaknesses and plan varied learning activities to help pupils make even more progress.

A great strength of the headteacher is her ability to create a tangible sense of community, where all those involved with the school want the very best for its future. Her excellent leadership has created a clear sense of direction, with a strong emphasis on teamwork. The school has improved substantially following a difficult few years and the issues arising from the last inspection have been tackled successfully. Self-evaluation is accurate and rigorous, but underpinned by trust and transparency. Governors are knowledgeable and highly committed. The parents' questionnaires returned before the inspection were virtually unanimous in their praise for the work of the school. One parent aptly described St Mark's as 'a great little school with great teachers'.

What the school should do to improve further

- Make more systematic use of assessment to pinpoint pupils' individual weaknesses and plan varied learning activities to enable them to make the maximum progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

In recent years there had been a dip in performance related to staffing difficulties and uncertainties in school leadership. The present headteacher has successfully tackled this and there is now a rising trend of achievement throughout the school. Achievement and standards are now good. Children's attainment on entry to the school varies from year to year because the numbers of children are so small. Overall it is average, but in some years it is lower than this. The initial progress of some children can be impeded by their lack of significant pre-school experience, but the school works hard to compensate for this. Consequently, pupils make good progress and standards in Year 2 are above average.

Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 3 to 6 because teaching successfully builds on the good foundations established in the early years. The most recent Year 6 national test results were well above average and comfortably exceeded the challenging targets set by the school. Excellent support for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities ensures that they make equally good progress.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Pupils greatly enjoy their education and are eager to participate in the very wide range of enrichment opportunities provided by the school. Attendance is good. Pupils relish opportunities to serve on the school council and provide each other with very high levels of care and support. They are keenly aware of the need to stay healthy and have responded enthusiastically to the school's strong emphasis on eating fresh fruit and vegetables. They are very careful when they are involved in practical work and know how to act safely outside school, for example when cycling or playing on the beach.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They have a clear sense of right and wrong and an impressive understanding of other cultures and religions. Their spiritual development is outstanding. They enjoy opportunities for quiet reflection, particularly for silent prayer when candles are lit in assembly.

Pupils are eager to take part in community events, for example organising a tea party to share memories with local residents and discuss what would be most valuable to keep and treasure for future generations. The school has a very accomplished choir which, at the time of the inspection, was preparing for a television appearance on the BBC Songs of Praise programme. This choir performs regularly for the local community. Pupils make the very most of the opportunities provided by the school so that they become confident and articulate children who are very well prepared for the next phase of their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teaching and learning are consistently good. Teachers manage classes very effectively and are clear about what they want pupils to learn. They plan their lessons carefully, using a good range of activities to stimulate the interest and enthusiasm of pupils of different ages and abilities. For example, in a history lesson with older pupils, the teacher made very effective use of old farming and domestic implements to prompt pupils to think about past life in their community. At present, the range of activities available in the Foundation Stage is constrained by the space available. The school is aware of this and an extension to provide more suitable accommodation for the youngest children is close to completion.

Teachers are making increasingly effective use of assessment information, but this remains an area for development. There are examples where assessment is used very effectively to pinpoint pupils' individual weaknesses and to plan varied learning activities to enable them to make the maximum progress. However, this is not yet done systematically across the school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is outstanding. In this small school all classes include pupils of different ages, but this is very well managed through a flexible approach to combining year groups. The school makes extremely effective use of visits and partnerships with outside organisations to provide a rich and varied curriculum. Physical education is greatly enhanced by links with local clubs and secondary schools and by the involvement of specialist instructors. Professional scientists and artists have also contributed to the teaching programme. The school is particularly successful in linking imaginative enrichment activities, in which all pupils are involved, with the usual programme of lessons. For example, the school's 'nature reserve' was used to very good effect to stage an outdoor performance of scenes from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Study of the Second World War was greatly enhanced by a VE day anniversary party, with pupils wearing 1940s style clothing, playing traditional games and eating the types of food that would have been available at the time.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

The quality of care, guidance and support is outstanding. The school has a secure and caring ethos and there are comprehensive arrangements for ensuring pupils' health, safety and protection. Consequently, pupils feel safe and are confident about approaching staff for support and help if they feel unhappy or anxious. Bullying is extremely rare because the school is quick to intervene to prevent any escalation of minor disagreements. Pupils with significant learning difficulties or disabilities are guided and supported very effectively by teachers and teaching assistants. The school works very hard to include those who have the most complex needs, drawing effectively on specialist support when this is required. Arrangements for the integration of pupils who transfer from other schools are exemplary; these pupils settle in quickly and make good progress, both academically and socially. One parent wrote that, 'Although my daughter began at St Mark's only one month ago, in such a short time I can see that she is extremely happy with her new school.'

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

Leadership and management are outstanding. The present headteacher was appointed following an extended period during which the school was without a substantive headteacher. During this time, staff worked hard to maintain the quality of education, but there were uncertainties about the future direction of the school and a dip in performance. The new headteacher quickly re-established morale and built a very strong team ethos. This is successfully combined with a sharp focus on self-evaluation and school improvement. Her excellent leadership has established a clear vision for the future of the school which is shared by all staff. There has been a marked improvement in test results and the school is very highly regarded by pupils, parents and the wider community. One parent wrote, 'Both our children have had a fabulous primary education thanks to a brilliant and dedicated staff.'

The school has a clear understanding of its strengths and areas for development. Judgements about the quality of teaching are accurate and perceptive and feedback to teachers is very skilfully handled. Governors are extremely supportive and play a very active role in the life of

school, sometimes contributing their own expertise to aspects of the school's work. They also bring a rigour to school self-evaluation, meeting with staff to review progress in key areas and scrutinising the school's overall performance. The school has outstanding capacity for further improvement.

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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?	1
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	2
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?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
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?	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	1

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?	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.

Annex A

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	1
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

25 June 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mark's C of E Primary School, Morwenstow, EX23 9PE

I am sure that you will remember that your school was inspected on 21–22 June 2007. I enjoyed meeting you and listening to your views. Many of your parents and carers completed a questionnaire to let me know how they felt about the school. I hope you will talk to them about the inspection report because it explains what your school does well and how it can become even better.

St Mark's is a good school with many outstanding features. There is a very happy and caring atmosphere. You behave very well and enjoy coming to school. In lessons you work hard and want to learn. I was pleased to see how many of you try to be healthy by eating sensibly and by knowing how to stay safe outside school, for example when you go to the beach. I was very impressed by the work of the school council and by the school choir when they practised for Songs of Praise. You look after each other very well and the staff also provide you with lots of care and support. You have good teachers who work very hard to plan lessons which are interesting and help you to learn. I was very impressed by how the school uses trips and visitors to help you find out about life in other times and countries. The photographs from these activities look very exciting! All of this helps you to make good progress and you do well in the tests that you take at the end of Year 2 and Year 6.

One of the main reasons why your school is so successful is that you have an excellent headteacher. She knows what your school does well and understands how to make it even better. She gets very good support from the other teachers and staff. There is one area where I think the school can improve:

- I have asked teachers to work out exactly what each of you needs to do to improve your work so that they can plan more varied activities to help you make even better progress. You can help by trying hard to tackle the work that they set you.

I wish you all the best for the future.

Yours faithfully

David Humphries Her Majesty's Inspector