

St Mary's Church of England Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	113478
Local Authority	Devon
Inspection number	289644
Inspection date	10 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Melvyn Hemmings

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	
School	70
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	David Arnott
Headteacher	Steve Cox
Date of previous school inspection	28 January 2002
School address	Elliott's Hill Brixton Plymouth PL8 2AG
Telephone number	01752 880436
Fax number	01752 882323

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a small primary school. The attainment of most children when they start in Reception is below average, particularly in their language skills. All pupils are from White British backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities is above average and several have statements of special educational need. A significant number of pupils join the school in Years 1 and 2, many with learning difficulties.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

This is a satisfactory school with some good features. Pupils' personal development is good and is reflected in the above average attendance rates and the very good relationships to be found throughout the school. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and are very pleased with the good care and support given to their children. One parental comment captures the views of many, 'We would recommend St Mary's to anyone looking for a school where the children matter so much'.

Pupils achieve satisfactorily and reach broadly average standards by the end of Year 6. In Reception, progress is satisfactory though by the time children enter Year 1 they are still working at levels below those expected, particularly in language and literacy. This satisfactory progress is maintained in Years 1 and 2. Over recent years standards at the end of Year 2 have been below average. Significant factors in this have been the high number of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities in the year group and several pupils joining school during Years 1 and 2. The current Year 2 class mirrors this situation. However, there is still scope to increase the rate of progress for pupils at the lower end of the school. Progress accelerates from Year 3 and is good, as pupils are able to build upon the foundations laid in earlier years and there is more stability in classes. However, there is some variation in how well pupils do in different subjects. Achievement in English is weaker than in mathematics and science. This results from pupils not having enough opportunities to practise and refine their basic literacy skills by writing at length in other subjects. Boys do not perform as well as girls and the school is trialling ways of engaging them more effectively in lessons to boost their achievement.

A wide range of out of school activities effectively enriches the satisfactory curriculum. These activities make a positive contribution to pupils' personal and social development. Good use is made of the local environment to extend pupils' learning by, for example, visiting the nearby quarry and taking walks on local footpaths. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers have secure subject knowledge that enables them to explain and demonstrate new ideas and techniques in a confident manner. Pupils show positive attitudes to their learning and clearly enjoy their activities. At times, the work set for pupils is not challenging enough, especially for the more able. Leadership and management are satisfactory with the headteacher having a clear vision for the school's future improvement. The school's self-evaluation has correctly identified priority areas for development, such as raising standards by the end of Year 2 and improving pupils' skills in writing. However, the strategies put into place to achieve this are not checked and evaluated rigorously enough. Consequently, the school does not have a clear view of their impact on pupils' learning. There are strong links with other organisations, such as the church and special needs support services, to promote pupils' well-being. Effective steps have been taken to bring about improvement since the last inspection, such as enhancing facilities for information and communication technology (ICT). There is satisfactory capacity for further improvement.

What the school should do to improve further

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- Improve the rate of progress in Reception and Years 1 and 2.
- Boost pupils' writing skills by providing more opportunities to write at length in other subjects.
- More rigorously evaluate the impact of strategies introduced to bring about improvement in provision. A small proportion of the schools whose overall effectiveness is judged

satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory and enables pupils to attain broadly average standards by the end of Year 6. In Reception, emphasis is placed on developing children's limited language skills. Though satisfactory progress is made, this aspect is still a relative weakness amongst the areas of learning on entering Year 1. Standards at the end of Year 2 are below average. Although affected by the high proportion of pupils with significant learning difficulties or those who arrive during Years 1 and 2, there is still room for improvement. Achievement in writing is weaker than in reading and mathematics. Pupils make better progress from Year 3 onwards, building on previous learning and benefiting from a more settled environment with fewer pupils joining the school. Achievement in writing remains a weakness compared to that in mathematics and science. Boys perform less well than girls, particularly in writing. Recent strategies put into place to address this are having a positive effect, with boys showing more interest and engagement in their writing activities.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils enjoy being at school, are friendly and welcoming and behave very well. Pupils work happily in pairs or small groups. The school's many successful sports teams give further opportunities for everyone to learn to work together. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. As a result, they know right from wrong and understand that people, such as the Sikh who recently came to talk about his faith, have different beliefs and traditions. They are knowledgeable about how to stay safe and to keep themselves healthy. Pupils move sensibly around the school and cooperate well with each other in the playground. Older pupils are caring and thoughtful towards younger ones. Pupils willingly take on various jobs around the school and make a positive contribution to the local community. They are satisfactorily prepared for their future lives.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

A calm and cheerful atmosphere in lessons has a positive effect on pupils' learning. Teachers manage their classrooms well, leading to good behaviour and pupils working at a good pace. In the Reception Year, children are encouraged to make choices for themselves, which effectively promotes their development as independent learners. Throughout the school, teachers use interactive whiteboards well to add interest to lessons. This was evident in a literacy lesson in Year 2 on developing skills in constructing sentences correctly. Teachers do not always use assessment information effectively to set challenging work for pupils, particularly the more able. The use of marking to show pupils how to improve their performance is inconsistent between classes. Learning assistants support pupils well, especially those with learning difficulties and disabilities, so they are effectively involved in all activities.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum in the Reception Year has been enhanced by the creation of an outside area for children to develop further their skills across the areas of learning. For older pupils the curriculum is effectively enriched by the opportunity to learn French and by a very good variety of sporting opportunities in and out of school. There is a good programme of visits offsite and of interesting events, such as the Royal Ballet workshop. These provide good opportunities to extend pupils' learning. The provision for ICT has been improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. However, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to use their basic ICT skills to enhance their work in other subjects. There are also too few opportunities for pupils to write at length in subjects other than English. The accommodation, which includes a large playing field and outdoor swimming pool, very effectively extends the experiences available for pupils and particularly promotes their health and fitness.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

'It's like a family here', one pupil observed and this describes the school's caring ethos very well. There is a very high level of commitment to ensuring the health and safety of all in the school community. All legal safeguarding requirements are met. Pupils know that the adults in the school are trustworthy and will always try to help them with any difficulties. They are confident that any bullying is quickly dealt with. Staff work very closely with parents and outside agencies to ensure that all pupils, especially those with learning difficulties and disabilities, are well cared for. Parents in turn are very appreciative of the support and friendliness they experience at St Mary's. The systems for promoting academic guidance have been strengthened since the last inspection and now effectively identify those pupils who need extra help. The procedures for checking pupils' progress are satisfactory but are not used consistently to set targets for the next stage in their learning.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The headteacher provides sound leadership and is clearly committed to enabling pupils of all abilities to reach their full potential. All involved in the school share his vision for school improvement and a strong team ethos is evident. The role of subject leaders has been improved since the last inspection so they have a better awareness of strengths and weaknesses in their subjects. This has enabled them to produce suitable action plans to take their subjects forward. This is evident in the way pupils now make better use of their numeracy skills in other subjects, such as when taking careful measurements during scientific experiments. The monitoring and evaluation of strategies put into place to bring about improvement are not rigorous enough. As a result, the school does not have information on what is working well or what may need to be revisited. Governors are very supportive and recognise the need to develop their role in holding the school to account for its performance.

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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
The quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	3

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	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
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?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
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

11 May 2007

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Mary's C of E Primary School, Brixton, Plymouth, PL8 2AG.

Thank you so much for welcoming us so warmly when we visited your school. We will remember for a long time your friendly, smiling faces. We enjoyed our time with you and consider your school to be a satisfactory one.

Your personal development is good and you behave well. Teaching and the curriculum are satisfactory, as is your achievement, and you reach average standards by the end of Year 6. All the adults in school take good care of you, which pleases your parents. All of you feel safe and secure in school and, as one of you said, 'It's like a family here'. You help to make your village a better place in which to live, for example by giving your views to the parish council on its future development. You told us you enjoy the many sporting activities you can take part in and we think that the school also organises lots of visits and visitors to help you to learn. The adults in charge of the school do a satisfactory job and are helping it to improve.

A special word of thanks to those pupils who gave up part of their lunchtime to talk to one of us. You are excellent ambassadors for your school.

What we have asked your school to do now:

- Help children in Reception and Years 1 and 2 to learn more quickly.
- Give you more opportunities to use your skills in writing in subjects such as history and geography.
- Check more closely if recent improvements are helping you to achieve better and reach higher standards.

All my best wishes for the future.

Melvyn Hemmings Lead inspector