



St Mary's Voluntary Controlled C of E School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117409
Local Authority HERTFORDSHIRE
Inspection number 290825
Inspection dates 22–23 November 2006
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 address	Heath Drive
School category	Voluntary controlled		Ware
Age range of pupils	7–11		Hertfordshire SG12 0RL
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01920 463641
Number on roll (school)	233	Fax number	01920 484897
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mr Pat Horridge
		Headteacher	Mr Andy Cosslett
Date of previous school inspection	12 March 2001		

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

This is an average sized school serving the market town of Ware. Pupils are entering the school with levels of knowledge and skills which are above those expected for their age. Most pupils are of White British background and their first language is English. A lower than average number has learning difficulties or disabilities. A higher than average number has a statement of educational needs. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average. The school has been awarded Healthy School status and Active Mark.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

St Mary's Voluntary Controlled Church of England School provides a satisfactory standard of education. This judgement matches the school's own evaluation. The headteacher of this improving school provides good and focused leadership. He and his capable deputy are acting effectively to address those areas of the school's work which need to be better, as seen in improved results at the end of Year 6 in writing. Other good strategies are being developed but are not yet embedded. This includes the role and effectiveness of subject leaders in achieving consistency of practice across the school and monitoring the work of the school which is not robust or regular enough. In general, leadership and management, including that of governors, is satisfactory. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

Achievement and standards are satisfactory. The progress pupils make from the time that they join the school is satisfactory. Improved results at higher levels in English have been facilitated by intervention strategies which are now also in place in mathematics. These are addressing gaps in learning caused by previous instability in staffing. Standards are above the national average. Progress in lessons is satisfactory rather than good because the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. There is some good teaching but learning is typically satisfactory. This is due to variations in teaching including the setting of work that does not consistently match closely enough the levels at which all learners are working. This is particularly so with the more able pupils. Self-assessment is well established in a number of classrooms and enthuses and directs pupils in their learning. Classroom management is calm, consistent and conducive to learning.

Pupils show very positive attitudes to school and to learning with good attendance rates and excellent behaviour. A strength of the school is the care and respect pupils show to each other and to staff, illustrating the Christian values which the school promotes. They enjoy working and playing, throwing themselves enthusiastically into activities and responding well to opportunities to take responsibility and to lead their peers. Their good understanding of healthy lifestyles is transferred into actions. Their personal development is good. Spiritual development is satisfactory but reflection times and prayers are not built carefully enough into the structure of the day. The care, guidance and support of pupils are satisfactory. The good pastoral care offered to pupils' and the detailed systems that the school has in place demonstrate its commitment to protect and safeguard pupils. Parents acknowledge this aspect of St. Mary's as a strong feature. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Information about pupils' levels is not used as well as it could be in setting work.

The curriculum is satisfactory. It is offering a variety of different learning experiences which are stimulating interest, including that of boys who in recent years have made less progress than girls. However, there is no provision for gifted and talented pupils and inconsistent provision for the more able. The resources for information and communication technology (ICT) continue to improve since the last inspection so that pupils enjoy increasing opportunities to learn for themselves. Exciting residential visits and a variety of visitors broaden life and learning experiences.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise the achievement of pupils throughout the school by ensuring consistency of practice in teaching and the use of assessment procedures.
- Develop the provision for the more able and those who are identified as gifted and talented.
- Ensure that the good systems that are being implemented by the leadership team are monitored, evaluated and reviewed rigorously and regularly so that they impact positively on the quality of education provided.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Inspectors agree that the achievement and standards of pupils are satisfactory. Pupils are making satisfactory progress from their starting points. In English last year there was an increase in the number of pupils attaining higher than expected levels. The proportion of pupils reaching expected levels in the national tests are above average. Standards rose in writing because of the effective intervention strategies that were put in place. These have been extended and broadened in English and mathematics to improve the rate of pupils' progress, and to address issues arising partly from a period of staffing instability. Pupils have made good progress in reading since they joined the school. Spelling skills let down the written work of some of them but generally there is better practice in English which is reflected in higher results. Girls continue to make more progress than boys but during the inspection there was evidence that teaching styles are motivating boys more. All groups of pupils, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, make satisfactory progress. Targets in English and science, which set satisfactory challenge, were met but were narrowly missed in mathematics.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good. Their attitudes and behaviour are outstanding. They have a very clear understanding of right and wrong and are invariably courteous and polite to one another, adults and visitors. They enjoy coming to school, feel safe and adopt safe practices. Their attendance is good. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory with their moral and social development being stronger than their cultural understanding. Pupils are making healthy lifestyle decisions. They raise funds for charities. The school council has led the way in helping to improve the school playground. Pupils prepare well for their future economic well-being through positions of leadership and participation in school activities. Pupils effectively learn how to share and work together, building a good foundation for later life.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers give pupils a clear picture of the purpose of each lesson by regularly referring to the success criteria by which learning will be judged. Staff make good use of classroom technology and paired and group work which pupils particularly enjoy. In less effective lessons, pupils are passive learners and the work is not consistently matched to each individual's needs so they do not always learn quickly enough. Marking makes clear to pupils when they have achieved the purpose of the lesson but it is less helpful in guiding pupils towards the next steps in their learning. Self and peer assessment are used well. Pupils are beginning to reflect more on their learning and what they need to focus on to improve. Support staff make a satisfactory contribution to learning. They are well briefed with clear roles. The school encourages all pupils to practise key skills at home and research for future work in school.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

The curriculum is satisfactory with good emphasis on developing basic literacy and numeracy skills. Provision in other subjects varies. ICT has improved since the last inspection. Other recent improvements include more active learning in science and cross-curricular activities. Although the curriculum is modified effectively to take account of the differing needs of pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, less account is taken of the needs of more able pupils and the gifted and talented. Provision for personal, social and health education is beneficial to personal development and includes systematic opportunities for pupils to develop awareness of living healthily.

Links with other schools, for example, French in Years 5 and 6 and design and technology in Year 5 enhance pupils' learning and enjoyment. A good range of clubs enrich learning. Visits and visitors extend and enliven the curriculum. Two year groups benefit from residential visits.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Pastoral care is good. Staff know pupils well and care for them effectively. Suitable support ensures pupils settle quickly into school and older pupils are well prepared for the next stage in their education. The health, safety and welfare of pupils are given high priority and procedures to protect them are good. Academic guidance is satisfactory. Assessment systems are thorough but are not used effectively to track pupils' progress and match activities to the levels at which pupils are working. Targets in English and mathematics are clear and support pupils' progress but not enough use is made of targets in science and other subjects. Although individual needs are accurately identified and suitable activities provided

for those with learning difficulties and disabilities, this is not yet the case for the more able pupils.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

The inspection team agrees with the school's evaluation that leadership and management are satisfactory. Those of the headteacher and deputy, who have been in post for just over a year, are good. The headteacher knows the strengths of the school and the areas for development. He has the support of staff and governors who share his vision. There has already been an improvement in standards of writing and improved systems are in place to monitor the progress of pupils. Staffing is now more stable. Parents are generally supportive and keen to be more involved in the life of the school. The work of the school is monitored but not with consistent rigour and regularity to move it forward as quickly as possible. The professional development of staff centres correctly on the priorities of the school. This has resulted in subject leaders being given clearly defined responsibilities for different subjects although their work is in the early stages of development. The school's capacity to improve is satisfactory at present. Governors support the school satisfactorily and the outgoing chair of governors has been pro-active in questioning its work and progress. Value for money is satisfactory.

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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?	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2
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	2
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	3
The behaviour of learners	1
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	3
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?	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?	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.

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

24 November 2006

Dear Pupils

St. Mary's Voluntary Controlled Church of England Junior School, Heath Drive, Ware, Hertfordshire, SG12 0RL

We really enjoyed meeting you when we visited your school recently. Thank you for making us welcome. We were pleased to be able to talk to you, see you working and learning and to watch you playing at breaks and lunchtimes. This letter will tell you what we found out about your school.

You enjoy school and behave exceptionally well. The relationships that you have with each other and with the staff are very good and result in a lovely atmosphere around the school. The school council has done a good job in improving the facilities at playtime and has also organised enjoyable money raising activities to help charities. You are now able to do more paired and group work which you say helps you to learn. Older pupils like learning French and enjoy visiting the nearby secondary school for design and technology lessons. You work well in lessons.

We know that you can make more progress in your learning and we have asked Mr Cosslett to make sure that everything is in place in lessons to help you to do that. Mr Cosslett and the teachers understand that those of you who are working at higher levels or who have particular gifts and talents need to always have work that is more challenging and be offered opportunities for different learning experiences. Finally, Mr Cosslett and the governors are going to check very regularly the work of the school to make sure that everything that is happening in school is helping you to make the best progress that you can in your learning.

We wish you good luck for the future.

Lynne Blakelock

Lead inspector