

St Margaret's-at-Cliffe Primary School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118495
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	291149
Inspection dates	24–25 April 2007
Reporting inspector	Terry Elston

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

Type of school	Primary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	191
School	
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Ashley Fenwick
Headteacher	Helen Comfort
Date of previous school inspection	1 October 2001
School address	Sea Street St Margaret's-at-Cliffe Dover CT15 6SS
Telephone number	01304 852639
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Age group	4–11
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

The school lies in a small village and takes most pupils from the immediate area. Many children enter the Reception class following attendance at the private Nursery next to the school. Compared with schools nationally, there are few pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities and the proportion eligible for free school meals is below average. None of the pupils speaks English as an additional language and very few come from minority ethnic groups. Children's attainment on entry is similar to that of most schools, but while most speak well and have good mathematical skills, their early reading and writing skills are weaker. The school has gained 'Investors in People' status and has the 'Healthy Schools' award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school that serves its community well. Pupils achieve well and make good progress because of the consistently good teaching. Children make a very good start in the Reception class and continue to do well throughout the school. As a result, standards overall by the time they leave are above average. The exception is in writing, where some older pupils struggle to write interesting stories that are correctly punctuated. The school recognises this and has improved the opportunities for writing in other subjects. However, the school's expectations of this additional writing are not always high enough, or monitored closely enough. Therefore, not all pupils are making the sort of progress of which they are capable. Nevertheless, leadership and management are good, and are important factors in the school's success. The school is led well by a strong headteacher who has high expectations of pupils and staff. Other leaders make effective contributions, particularly by using the detailed assessments of pupils to raise standards. Governors support and guide the school well and are not afraid to hold the school to account. This effective leadership has helped the school make good progress since the last inspection and shows why it should continue to do so.

Parents think highly of the school, particularly the good care, support and guidance it provides for their children. As a result, pupils' personal development and well-being are good and they are quick to say how much they enjoy school and feel safe. Their behaviour is good because that is what is expected. They value the interesting lessons and the way teachers help them when they are stuck. Pupils strive hard to meet their challenging targets, and are justifiably proud of their achievements. A typical comment was, 'I like having targets because I know when I've done well.' The curriculum is good because the school has worked effectively to make it interesting for pupils. It provides a good balance between work on developing pupils' basic literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills and topic work that brings together different subjects. The Year 4 topic on the Tudors, which pupils enjoyed greatly, led to high standards of work.

What the school should do to improve further

- Have higher expectations of the quality of pupils' writing in all subjects in Years 3 to 6, particularly concerning their use of descriptive words and punctuation.
- Monitor and evaluate pupils' writing more rigorously so that they know what to do to improve.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Children in Reception make a good start to school and achieve well. They make good progress and exceed the expected goals in all areas except aspects of reading and writing by the end of the year. In Years 1 and 2, standards have been rising steadily and are significantly above those found nationally in reading, writing and mathematics. In last year's assessments at Year 2, standards were well above average in all subjects.

In the 2006 national tests, standards in Year 6 were above the national average in English, mathematics and science and maintained the steady improvement over recent years. Pupils exceeded their challenging targets in English but missed them narrowly in mathematics. In English, while standards in reading were high, writing was relatively weak. Standards attained by the current pupils in Year 6 are above average in English, mathematics and science, but while the action taken to improve pupils' writing has started to make an impact, standards

remain lower than in reading. In particular, pupils do not always take enough care with punctuation and they make too little use of interesting descriptive words. The tracking of pupils' attainment over time shows that they make good progress in all subjects except writing, where progress is satisfactory. Other strengths in pupils' attainment can be found in their art and design work – which is exceptional –, competitive sports and music. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve well and make particularly good progress in their reading.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' good personal development and well-being make significant contributions to their learning. One pupil's views were typical of many when she said, 'It's a good school because you learn lots and feel very safe.' Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils think deeply about issues and have the confidence to express their feelings on topics such as sadness and loneliness. They have a very good awareness of different cultures of the world while taking full advantage of local opportunities, including theatres, history societies and exhibitions. Pupils develop a clear sense of right and wrong and behave well. Attendance is good. Pupils enjoy school but not all of them like writing because they find it difficult. Pupils feel safe in school and have the maturity to talk to adults or put a note in the 'worry box' when they have any concerns. They explain knowledgeably about how to live healthy lifestyles and speak highly of the way a television chef has helped transform the food prepared for them at lunchtime. They are proud of their local community and involve themselves enthusiastically in projects to improve their school grounds and reduce traffic congestion outside the school. Pupils take responsibility readily and the active school council is justifiably proud of the work it does to improve the school. Pupils feel well prepared for the future by taking full advantage of the many opportunities to plan budgets, work together on sales projects and improve their communication skills.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The good quality of teaching explains why pupils learn so quickly throughout the school. Teachers have very high expectations of pupils' work and they respond well by trying hard to succeed. Occasionally, however, teachers set their sights too high and a minority of pupils struggle to understand the work. For example, in a fast-paced numeracy lesson, nearly all pupils relished the challenge of working out complex sums involving fractions, but those with weaker mathematical skills soon fell behind and lost interest. Teachers give pupils plenty of opportunities to work independently and they do this well, especially the more able groups. This starts successfully in the Reception class, where children soon learn how to organise their work and select their next task. Teachers make lessons enjoyable by using exciting resources, including large computer screens that pupils find fascinating. Teachers assess pupils' work regularly and set them challenging but achievable targets. This gives pupils a good feel for how well they are doing and how they can improve. The very good partnership between teachers and teaching assistants ensures that pupils of all abilities get the support they need to succeed.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The good curriculum makes learning interesting and relevant for all groups of pupils. There is a strong focus on reading and number skills that explains why pupils do so well in these subjects. As a result, pupils are now more likely to read for their own pleasure. In writing, the school has rightly focused on encouraging pupils to write more in all subjects, but there is too little regard for the quality of this writing. As a result, writing in subjects such as religious education and science is often of a much lower standard than in English lessons. The good provision for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities explains why they make rapid progress, especially in reading and number. The school brings the curriculum to life with a good range of visits and visitors. Popular activities at lunchtime and after school also enrich the curriculum. The school has forged good links with the community, including the church, the parish council and history society, that give pupils a clear understanding of the richness of their local area. Provision for personal, social and health education is good, and gives pupils valuable opportunities to discuss their worries and learn how to stay healthy. The inclusion of French in the curriculum is valued highly by pupils and parents. There is good provision for gifted and talented pupils to develop their abilities further, both in lessons and in musical and sporting activities.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

The good quality of care, guidance and support has a strong impact on the personal development and achievement of pupils. All adults provide very good care and support, especially for vulnerable children and their families. There are robust systems in place to ensure the health, safety and well-being of pupils. Academic guidance is good, with clear and effective individual setting of targets to help pupils know what they need to do to improve their work. This is enhanced by the way that pupils are expected to assess and evaluate their own progress. In general, the marking of pupils' work provides valuable guidance to help them improve, and they say how much they value teachers' comments. However, the exception is in writing, where there is not always enough emphasis on technical skills.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher provides strong leadership and is supported well by the senior leadership team, who provide valuable data on standards and school effectiveness. Since her appointment three years ago, the headteacher has managed change well through planned actions, based firmly on reviewing practice and identifying strengths and weaknesses. There is a clear vision for improvement that is shared by the staff and governors. Systems to measure pupils' progress and achievement are good and are resulting in higher standards. Recent improvements in reading, for example, were the result of a detailed review of pupils' progress and a new, whole-school approach to the teaching of phonics. In order to raise standards in writing, the leaders rightly encouraged teachers to provide more writing opportunities in all subjects. However, the monitoring of this initiative lacked the rigour necessary to get the best out of pupils and standards are still not high enough. Governors are supportive, know the school well and take a keen interest in all its work. They are also prepared to challenge under-performance.

The day-to-day management of the school and its finances is efficient, and resources are managed well. The training and deployment of teaching assistants is particularly effective. The evaluation of the performance of staff works effectively at all levels. Through monitoring, coaching and training, there is a consistent approach to teaching, assessment and the management of behaviour that does much to ensure pupils' good progress.

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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 quality and standards in the Foundation Stage	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	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?	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	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?	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?	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

27 April 2007

Dear Pupils,

Inspection of St Margaret's-at-Cliffe Primary School, Sea Street, St Margaret's-at-Cliffe, Dover, Kent CT15 6SS Thank you for your important contributions to this inspection. You all made the inspectors very welcome, and those who were kind enough to speak to us told us a lot about your school.

What we found out about your school

You make good progress. Your standards are above the national average in most subjects, although in writing, some of you could do even better. Your personal development and well-being are good. You enjoy lessons, especially art and design and information and communication technology, work hard and keep safe. Your behaviour is nearly always good and you are kind to each other. Your teachers are doing a good job. They make lessons interesting and help you learn quickly. Teachers check on your progress carefully and tell you clearly how to improve your work.

The curriculum is good and is planned to give you a good balance of work in all subjects. It also helps you to learn about how to stay safe and live healthy lives. You are well cared for by all the staff. They help you when you are upset or worried. The school's leadership and management are good. The headteacher and other leaders know how to improve things and ensure the school runs smoothly.

What we want the school to do now

Raise standards in writing so they are as good as in other subjects. Make better checks on the quality of your writing so that you know how to do even better.

Yours sincerely,

Terry Elston Lead inspector